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itself. There's no point in rebreaking it and setting it because the resulting arthritis will make it even more painful." He said to try to bend it, squeeze a small ball, and come back in two weeks.

Two weeks later, after complaining that I had not been able to see my PA since my visit to the doctor, the PA called me into his office. He said to just do what the doctor had told me to do, but the prison would not pay for the follow-up ordered by the specialist. It was an unnecessary expense, the PA said.

I have essentially lost the use of my finger. It is swollen, painful, misshapen, and discolored. My father-in-law, who happens to be a prominent physician, examined my finger last month during a visit. His verdict? "You're screwed. They should have treated this the day it happened. You'll never recover full use of the finger, and now arthritis will set in." Thanks a lot. I'm lucky it wasn't my leg that was broken, like Cameron Douglas.

Dealing with the stress of a hostile system would be impossible without a support network. I've developed several friendships, with one being particularly close. A former intelligence officer, Dave (I'll use only his first name to protect his identity) is 18 months into a nine-year sentence. (We worked together overseas years ago and were reacquainted at Loreto.) His story is a vivid example of what is wrong with the criminal justice system.

After a long career that took him all over the world, Dave

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returned to the U.S. and went to work for a defense contractor. His job was to win new business in the intelligence community for his employer, which he did successfully, including getting his company accepted as one of the CIA's preferred and vetted bidders. No easy task.

When asked by his employer to help on a contract the firm was having trouble with, he agreed. The facility security officer (FSO) told him that he had been added as a member of the contract team. He logged on to the secure "Intelink" database, managed by the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) to begin his background reading for the contract. (I should add, too, that Dave was never accused of misusing any information or of putting the country's secrets at risk. He was only accessing the information in furtherance of his job.) But as it turned out, the contractor dropped the ball and Dave had not been added to the contract. The Justice Department charged him with unauthorized access of a secure database in furtherance of national security, a felony. Dave was initially offered a plea that included a 15-month prison sentence. He declined, intending to clear his name at trial.

After @ Dave refused to cooperate with authorities, they did what they always do: They turned up the pressure by turning his life upside down, looking for anything they could use against him. When they were finished heaping on charges, he was threatened with 54 years in prison. (Check out "Three Felonies a Day," by Harvey Silverglate, which I mentioned earlier, to see how easy it is for regular citizens

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to fall afoul of the bloated United States Code, the law of the land.)

When Dave continued to resist taking a plea, the government got really nasty. They seized everything of value that Dave owned: Property, money, electronics, furniture, art, even his clothes and his wife's shoes. He was forced to claim indigency to qualify for a public defender to fight these spurious charges. The government then took it one step further and, unbelievably, charged Dave with perjury for claiming poverty, as he sat in jail with the government holding everything he owned!

Forced to rely on inadequate counsel and facing 54 years, the government came calling on Dave again. The new offer was not 15 months. It was nine years, and if he did not accept it in its entirety within 48 hours, the Justice Department was prepared to subpoena and involve two innocent people he loved, his 89-year-old grandmother and his 16-year-old honor roll student daughter. Dave no longer had any choice. He signed the plea, even though he believed that he would have prevailed at trial. The risks were too high.

The day after Dave was sentenced, the government gave back everything it had seized. It was their cynical attempt to make everything in Dave's life difficult as he tried to defend himself. I wish I could say that these strong-arm tactics were unusual. But that is not the case. In my own case I faced a possible 45-year sentence. I, too, believed I was innocent. But I was forced to take a

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guilty plea with 30 months to make the whole thing go away. The government has a 98.2% conviction rate, according to ProPublica. It doesn't take a genius to figure out why. (As an aside, when Saddam Hussein won 98% in his last presidential election, we all said the fix was in. When the Justice Department gets a 98% conviction rate, we say they're really great attorneys. Well, I don't say that anymore.)

My other Loretto friends are good guys who've committed serious or, in some cases, stupid crimes. But they're smart and sincere and I enjoy their company. Robert, 61, owned a very successful car dealership in Buffalo, NY. After a dispute with the State of New York over a corrupt DMV official, Robert was refused new "dealer" license plates. He went to the DMV in a huff, where he was again denied his plates. As he was leaving, he shouted, "I'm going to burn this place to the ground!" Late that night the place burned to the ground. Robert is doing five years on an arson charge.

Art, 75, is a career criminal. After a 10-year stint in the federal penitentiary at Leavenworth for bank robbery, he did additional time at the federal penitentiary at Terre Haute, IN for counterfeiting - all hard time. In the early 1980s, Art and a friend pulled off what was, at the time, the greatest jewel heist in British history when they stole the 54-carat "Marlborough Diamond" from London's famed Graff's Jewelers. Art was caught at Chicago O'Hare and extradited back to the UK, where he was sentenced to another 15 years. The diamond was never found. Art is doing

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another eight years here at Loretto for conspiring to rob the home of the deceased boss of the Chicago "Syndicate." He hadn't realized that the FBI had wired his van for sound. I asked Art what he did with the Marlborough Diamond. He just smiled and said, "I lived a lot of good years on that rock."

My sentence is relatively short. I'll likely do another 17 or 18 months or so. But 18 months feels like 18 years some days. I'm fortunate to have friends to help me get through it.

For more information about my case, please visit my website at www.defendjohnk.com.

Until next time,

John